

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 002067

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IT](#) [IT](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY'S UPCOMING LOCAL ELECTIONS: POLITICS AS USUAL

REF: A) ROME 1971 B) ROME 294 C) 02 ROME 0011

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 ROME 02067 01 OF 02 131444Z

1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: UPCOMING LOCAL ELECTIONS INVOLVING A THIRD OF ITALY'S ELECTORATE ARE UNLIKELY TO HAVE MUCH IMPACT ON NATIONAL POLITICS, THOUGH A CASUAL OBSERVER WOULD NEVER KNOW IT FROM THE PITCHED MEDIA BATTLES BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION. POLITICIANS ARE MADLY SPINNING THE PROJECTED RESULTS, AS THEY WILL THE FINAL RESULTS. THE BERLUSCONI GOVERNMENT WOULD WELCOME A STRONG SHOWING TO REAFFIRM ONGOING PUBLIC SUPPORT AS THE PRIME MINISTER'S LEGAL PROBLEMS REMAIN FRONT AND CENTER (REF A). WE SUSPECT FEW ITALIANS WILL HAVE NATIONAL ISSUES (OR THE WAR ON IRAQ) ON THEIR MINDS AS THEY VOTE FOR THEIR LOCAL MAYOR OR COUNCIL MEMBER. THE ITALIAN MEDIA HAS USED OCCASIONAL SQUABBLES WITHIN COALITIONS (ESPECIALLY THE CENTER-RIGHT GOVERNMENT) AS THEY NEGOTIATE WHEN, WHO AND WHERE TO RUN SINGLE CANDIDATES TO HIGHLIGHT POLITICAL DISARRAY. BUT IN TRUTH THE LEAD-UP TO THESE NOT-SO-TERRIBLY SIGNIFICANT ELECTIONS HAS BEEN NOT SO TERRIBLY SIGNIFICANT. THE RESULTS SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS INDICATIVE OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT'S STAYING POWER. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

2. (U) BETWEEN MAY 18 AND JUNE 23, ITALIAN ELECTORS WILL BE CALLED TO VOTE IN A SERIES OF ELECTIONS FOR LOCAL (CITY, PROVINCE, AND REGION) OFFICIALS, AS WELL AS IN A NATIONAL REFERENDUM.
-- ON MAY 25-26, ALMOST THIRTEEN MILLION ITALIANS WILL VOTE FOR 12 PROVINCIAL COUNCILS AND 495 CITY COUNCILS. RUN-OFF ELECTIONS WILL BE JUNE 8-9. (NOTE: ITALIAN ELECTIONS NORMALLY ARE HELD FROM SUNDAY MORNING TO THE FOLLOWING MONDAY AT MID-DAY, WITH POLLS CLOSING OVERNIGHT.)
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 ROME 02067 01 OF 02 131444Z

-- A REFERENDUM VOTE ON THE FAMOUS "ARTICLE 18" EMPLOYMENT STATUTE GOVERNING FIRING OF EMPLOYEES WILL BE HELD ON JUNE 15 (REF B AND SEPTTEL).
-- A SUPPLEMENTAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION FOR ONE OF THE DISTRICTS IN THE LAZIO (ROME) REGION WILL BE HELD JUNE 22-23 TO FILL A VACANT SENATE SEAT.

3. (U) ITALY'S FIVE AUTONOMOUS REGIONS HAVE THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN ELECTION DATES, AND THREE INDEED SET THEIRS SEPARATELY. SARDINIA AND SICILY CHOSE TO KEEP THEIR CITY AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS ON THE NATIONALLY-SELECTED MAY 25-26 DATES. (NOTE: ITALY'S FIVE AUTONOMOUS REGIONS ARE VALLE D'AOSTA, TRENTINO-ALTO ADIGE, AND FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA, ALL IN THE NORTH, AND THE ISLANDS OF SARDINIA AND SICILY. EACH REGION HAS A DIFFERENT STATUTE GRANTING IT CERTAIN RIGHTS, INTER ALIA THAT OF IMPLEMENTING ITS OWN ELECTION LAWS.) ITALY'S 15 NON-AUTONOMOUS REGIONS ELECT THEIR PRESIDENTS CONCURRENTLY (THE NEXT ELECTIONS WILL BE IN 2005), AND THOSE ELECTIONS ARE HOTLY CONTESTED BY NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES, ATTRACT CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION, AND REFLECT THE NATIONAL MOOD AND INTERESTS. THE SEPARATELY-HELD ELECTIONS FOR THE AUTONOMOUS REGIONS, HOWEVER, ARE LESS SIGNIFICANT NATIONALLY.
-- ON MAY 18, ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN TRENTINO-ALTO ADIGE FOR THREE CITY COUNCILS;
-- JUNE 8 WAS SELECTED BY VALLE D'AOSTA FOR ELECTIONS FOR A NEW REGIONAL PRESIDENT AND ONE CITY COUNCIL;
-- JUNE 8-9, RESIDENTS OF FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA WILL CHOOSE A NEW REGIONAL PRESIDENT AND SEVEN CITY COUNCILS.

4. (SBU) LOCAL ELECTIONS GENERALLY NEITHER REFLECT NOR
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 ROME 02067 01 OF 02 131444Z

SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT NATIONAL POLITICS, SINCE ITALIAN VOTERS AND CANDIDATES -- LIKE THEIR AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS -- TEND TO FOCUS ON LOCAL PERSONALITIES AND ISSUES WHEN VOTING FOR THEIR MAYORS AND CITY OR PROVINCIAL COUNCILS. THIS SPRING'S LOCAL ELECTIONS ARE SOMEWHAT LESS SIGNIFICANT NATIONALLY THAN MOST, SINCE NO MAJOR CITIES ARE HOLDING ELECTIONS. POLITICIANS, HOWEVER, CAN BE EXPECTED TO SEEK TO PORTRAY RESULTS AS A REFERENDUM ON BERLUSCONI AND HIS POLICIES. IF THE CENTER-RIGHT WINS OVERALL, ITS MEMBERS

WILL ANNOUNCE THAT THE PUBLIC HAS AGAIN SHOWN ITS SUPPORT FOR THE PRIME MINISTER. IF THE REVERSE OCCURS, THE CENTER-LEFT OPPOSITION WILL TRUMPET THE PUBLIC'S REJECTION OF THE GOI AND ITS LEADER. IN EITHER CASE, WE SUSPECT, AND MOST OF OUR CONTACTS CONCUR, THAT MOST VOTERS WILL THINK LITTLE, IF AT ALL, ABOUT BERLUSCONI'S LEGAL PROBLEMS, ECONOMIC REFORM, GOVERNMENT RESTRUCTURING, OR THE WAR IN IRAQ WHEN CASTING THEIR VOTE FOR CITY MAYOR.

15. (SBU) THIS TENDENCY, COUPLED WITH A TENDENCY FOR THE CENTER-LEFT TO BE SOMEWHAT STRONGER IN LOCAL ELECTIONS DUE TO BETTER ORGANIZATION AND CANDIDATES, MAY BE EXACTLY WHAT BERLUSCONI IS SEEKING TO COMBAT WITH SOME OF HIS RECENT, MORE INFLAMMATORY RHETORIC. BY RAISING THE SPECTER OF A POTENTIAL "COMMUNIST VICTORY" AND PORTRAYING HIMSELF AS A

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED PTQ5257

PAGE 01 ROME 02067 02 OF 02 131445Z
ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00
	DS-00	UTED-00	VC-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01
	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OMB-01	OPIC-01
	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00
	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	IIP-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-01	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/006W		
					-----644928	131509Z	/38

R 131444Z MAY 03
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9833
INFO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES
AMCONSUL FLORENCE

UNCLAS SECTION 02 OF 02 ROME 002067

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IT](#) [IT](#) [PGOV](#)
SUBJECT: ITALY'S UPCOMING LOCAL ELECTIONS: POLITICS AS USUAL

VICTIM OF LEFTIST PERSECUTION (COMMENT: WHICH HE TRULY BELIEVES, IN ANY EVENT), HE MAY BE SEEKING TO "NATIONALIZE" LOCAL ELECTIONS AND THUS URGE AT LEAST SOME OF THE VOTERS
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 ROME 02067 02 OF 02 131445Z
WHO ELECTED HIM IN 2001 TO THE POLLS TO CAST CENTER-RIGHT VOTES. A LOUDER STRATEGY RISKS NOISIER POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS IN THE EVENT OF A POOR CENTER-RIGHT SHOWING, HOWEVER. PROMINENT COLUMNIST STEFANO FOLLI NOTED IN LEADING CENTRIST DAILY "CORRIERE DELLA SERA" ON MAY 12 THAT "A BAD SHOW BY BERLUSCONI'S COALITION ON MAY 25...COULD TURN INTO SOMETHING BIGGER THAN A (MID-TERM) SETBACK..." FOLLI ALSO HIGHLIGHTS THE ABSOLUTE IMPERATIVE, AND THUS THE VIRTUAL GUARANTEE, THAT THE GOVERNING COALITION REMAIN UNITED THROUGH, AND BEYOND, THESE ELECTIONS.

16. (U) THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE JUNE 15 REFERENDUM REGARDING CHANGES TO LABOR STATUTE ARTICLE 18 WILL BE FULLY ANALYZED SEPTEL. THIS REFERENDUM WILL BE THE FIRST OCCASION FOR ITALIAN CITIZENS TO VOTE FROM ABROAD. IN THE PAST, ITALIANS LIVING ABROAD HAD TO TRAVEL TO ITALY TO VOTE, BUT IN DECEMBER 2001 A LAW WAS PASSED TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION, MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR ITALIAN CITIZENS TO VOTE FROM ABROAD (REF C) IN NATIONAL-LEVEL ELECTIONS.

17. (SBU) THE SENATE SUPPLEMENTAL ELECTION IN LAZIO WILL REPLACE CENTER-LEFT SENATOR SEVERINO LAVAGNINI WHO DIED RECENTLY. MOST LIKELY THE SEAT WILL GO TO THE CENTER-LEFT AGAIN. LAVAGNINI WON THE 2001 ELECTION BY A HANDFUL OF VOTES WHEN THE CENTER-LEFT OLIVE TREE (ULIVO) COALITION AND COMMUNIST RENEWAL (RC) RAN SEPARATE CANDIDATES. AS THIS IS A SINGLE SEAT ELECTION, RC MAY DECIDE TO SUPPORT THE ULIVO CANDIDATE, GIVING THE CENTER-LEFT A BETTER CHANCE TO WIN. THIS ELECTION WILL NOT CHANGE THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE SENATE, IN ANY EVENT.
SEMBLER

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 ROME 02067 02 OF 02 131445Z

UNCLASSIFIED

>

2003ROME02067 - Classification: UNCLASSIFIED